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Viewing cable **06MANAGUA869**, NICARAGUAN ELECTIONS REGIONAL REPORTING: NUEVA

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06MANAGUA869	2006-04-20 18:03	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2016

TAGS: PGOV KDEM SOCI NU

SUBJECT: NICARAGUAN ELECTIONS REGIONAL REPORTING: NUEVA
SEGOVIA

REF: A. MANAGUA 0802

¶B. MANAGUA 0738

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Liberals of all stripes in the largely Liberal Nicaraguan department of Nueva Segovia recently expressed concern to Emboffs that the FSLN is gaining support with poor voters by distributing agricultural goods and helping followers obtain voting documents in advance of the November national elections. Emboffs have heard from contacts that such support may well have come from Venezuelan "donations". Officials of the ALN-PC and APRE applauded Ambassador's statements against caudillismo, while the PLC members were cautiously critical. Everyone complained about partisanship on the local Electoral Council (CED), although the local CED president (a Liberal) insisted that all CED activities are carried out according to regulations. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO) and Information Resources Director (IRD) met with local political, economic, and social leaders in Ocotal, Nueva Segovia, on April 6 and 7 to discuss upcoming national elections and other issues. Nueva Segovia has 12 municipalities, four of them controlled by the FSLN and eight by the PLC. The two largest cities of Ocotal (32,000) and Jalapa (30,000) are FSLN territory, as are the two small towns of Dipilto and San Fernando.

ALN MEMBERS VIEW PLC AS MAIN RIVAL

¶3. (SBU) Former mayor of El Jicaro and ex-Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) chairman for Nueva Segovia Luis Sarantes organized almost 35 supporters of the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) to meet with Emboffs, who were expecting to meet with a more modest group. The reception by teachers, businessmen, small farmers and housewives was effusive. Approximately 90% of the ALN supporters previously held positions, some senior, in the PLC. Regarding the upcoming national elections, the ALN expressed concern about cedulaization (the process of obtaining a national/voter ID card) and the partisan nature of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), and discussed the financial and material advantages of the Sandinista Front (FSLN).

¶4. (C) According to the ALN members, the FSLN is reaching out to small farmers (campesinos) by offering fertilizer and crop assistance, facilitating cedulaization paperwork by filling out applications, and campaigning with new vehicles.

(Comment: ALN members were quiet when asked if they were doing the same for their supporters. End Comment.) They complained that the CSE is tightly controlled by the FSLN and the PLC, while smaller or newer parties like the ALN are not represented. They insisted that international observers should be vigilant with the CSE's calendar (ref A), ensuring that each deadline is met. One ALN member even insisted that international observers should take over the CSE and handle the elections.

¶15. (SBU) While enthusiastically supportive of Eduardo Montealegre, ALN members claimed that election polls do not reflect the true feelings of broader Nicaragua because they're taken only in Managua -- the regional elections have provided the most convincing survey to date, they said. Participants asserted that survey results are distorted by the PLC in radio campaigns that reach rural areas to falsely imply that PLC candidates are in lead. According to the ALN interlocutors, the ALN expects to draw its votes from the PLC. They predicted that now that Rizo is the PLC presidential candidate, local PLC loyalists, mainly farmers, are very unlikely to switch to the ALN.

¶16. (SBU) According to ALN supporters, Sandinista dissident Herty Lewites visited Nueva Segovia, but he was received by no more than 50 people. Alejandro Martinez Cuenca, Daniel Ortega's main rival in the FSLN, has also traveled to the region, but has drawn no followers, while APRE presidential pre-candidate Jose Antonio Alvarado held a small reception of about 80 supporters from Ocotal.

¶17. (SBU) When asked how citizens from the department viewed the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. Government, the room came alive with cries of "Bravo" and "Trivelli!" ALN party members feel that the U.S. has an important and valid role to play as a "protagonist" in the elections process, and applauded the

Ambassador for not equivocating in his message. One supporter suggested loading Ortega and Aleman on a plane and sending them to play poker with former Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega.

LOCAL CSE OFFICIAL CLAIMS CEDULIZATION NOT A PROBLEM

¶18. (SBU) Embassy officials met with local Departmental Electoral Council (CED) President Rommel Enrique Reyes at the CED headquarters. Reyes is a flag-waving PLC member with six years of experience as president, having overseen two municipal elections and one national election. He is young and was chosen for the office originally as a member of the Resistance Party (PRN). His large office was sparsely furnished, with modest accoutrements consisting of a filing cabinet, a table, and a small desk with a telephone and USAID-donated fax machine. A framed photograph of Reyes at the U.S. Capitol Building, a photograph of his wife and daughter at Disneyland, and a photograph of Anastasio Somoza were displayed on the table.

¶19. (SBU) When queried if he thought the upcoming elections would be free and fair, Reyes, a lawyer by training, immediately recited Nicaraguan electoral law, expressing utter faith in its clarity and ability to promote electoral transparency. He compared Nicaraguan electoral law to El Salvador's, noting the similar structure to the laws of both countries. "The difference is that the Left in El Salvador is more democratic and rule-bound than the FSLN here," he said. "The FSLN is not prepared to lose the election."

¶10. (SBU) The PLC and FSLN enjoy the most support in the department, he claimed, with the FSLN controlling the cities and the PLC gaining its support from the countryside. "We are a Liberal Department," he emphasized. As for national surveys, Reyes, view was similar to the ALN's: the results can be seen in the Atlantic Coast regional elections "the PLC clearly has the mandate." Candidates campaigning in Ocotal include all the PLC pre-candidates and Lewites, who appears to have few supporters locally, Reyes noted.

¶11. (SBU) Reyes indicated that there is no problem with cedulaization, and claims to keep a firm hand on the cedulaization process, not allowing the FSLN to interfere. Still, the CED office holds 4,300 cedulas, 1,800 of them unclaimed since 1988. Reyes coordinates with the civil registers at the mayors' offices so the CED can project how many people in the Department will reach 16 years in and need cedulas to vote. Reyes was satisfied with a new cedulaization initiative that pairs a new employee in each municipality with the CED to improve cedula issuance. (PLC mayors criticize the new arrangement, citing inadequate training and support by the CSE.) In May, Reyes added, the Council will hire new staff for technical assistance, and is already splitting these positions between PLC and FSLN loyalists.

¶12. (C) Throughout the meeting, Reyes glanced down with the slight, confounded smile of a person who realizes others may doubt his sincerity. Nonetheless, he was forthcoming with information, including the fact that he was present at the meeting where CSE president Roberto Rivas decided to make it "difficult" for Embassy officials to get accredited as elections observers. (Comment: Ultimately, post's efforts to elicit cooperation from the CSE succeeded and the CSE accredited Emboffs. End Comment.) When asked how the party feels about USG statements regarding Aleman, Reyes indicated that "some of the party people say things against intervention as a public line," but that on a personal level "USG interventionism is expected."

PRIVATE SECTOR TIRED OF PACT, APPRECIATES USG EFFORTS

¶13. (SBU): Embassy staff met with four members of the Nueva Segovia Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. The business interests of those present, including board President Daysi Reyes and board officers Isasio Beltran and Donald Roque, are mainly family operations: bulk resale, supermarkets, construction materials, and the production and mid-level distribution of coffee.

¶14. (SBU) When asked about the freedom and fairness of the upcoming elections, Roque criticized the PLC-FSLN pact. The businessmen and women claimed that the government "is

good for collecting taxes but not much more." The local producers are starting to feel squeezed between the taxes of the central government and new taxes imposed by local mayors.

As a result, to avoid appearing too successful, the local growers are avoiding making investments in their own businesses. They also noted that in an electoral year, everyone thinks twice about investing or purchasing on a large scale. "The economy freezes," they said. The businesses are able to survive because they are family businesses. National surveys are not thought to reflect the views of the wider Nicaraguan citizenry: "they never asked us," said Reyes indignantly. They reported a positive perception of the Embassy and approved of the USG message, which was described as "very clear." Of the Ambassador they reported: "He speaks the truth and does so out of interest" for Nicaragua.

PLC OFFICIALS SATISFIED WITH RIZO

¶15. (SBU) A local group of elected PLC officials agreed to meet with Emboffs, although several arrived late. The vice mayor of Mozante and a councilman from Jicaro averred that the potential for free and fair elections is evident in the PLC "primary" (ref B). They were happy about the process for selecting the candidate, noting "a good deal of consultation within the lower ranks" before the vote. Although the Nueva Segovia delegates primarily voted for Ramiro Sacasa, PLC members were satisfied with the process despite Rizo's victory.

¶16. (U) When asked if this "success of the democratic

process" would carry over into November, the members responded that "each party has its own fiscales (trained poll watchers)" to ensure a fair vote. They note, however, the problems of 2004 municipal elections, in which voters arrived at their voting table (JRV) only to find their names not listed in the official registry (padron). The PLC officials expect the same problem this year, and have vehicles ready to transport voters from one JRV to another.

¶17. (SBU) While CED President Reyes expressed satisfaction with the cedulization agreement with the mayors, offices, the PLC mayors are not too happy about the arrangement, complaining that now the mayors are "stuck" with doing all the paperwork and bringing it to the CED. "This is the CSE's job," claimed the councilman from Jicaro, one for which the CSE has provided no training or supplies to carry out the task. This process hasn't improved the overall system of cedulization, nor is it impartial. The "cedulizers" from FSLN alcaldias, for example, are assisting FSLN voters to receive their cedulas, going to their houses and helping deliver birth certificates and other pertinent documents, "but they are not assisting non-FSLN supporters," claimed the officials.

¶18. (U) As for polling results, the PLC officials asserted that surveys, especially those taken before the PLC primary, do not accurately reflect the level of support for the party.

PLC members pointed to the regional elections as an appropriate measuring stick for November.

¶19. (SBU) When asked for their views on the US Embassy's role in Nicaragua, the PLC officials carefully responded, "The US has helped Nicaragua achieve democracy and through its own history of democracy has a lot to teach." One mayor acknowledged all of the assistance the USG had provided to Nicaragua before commenting that the US is "too close" to Nicaragua and "Nicaragua is inconvenienced by this influence and proximity." The mayor of Jicaro, who arrived an hour and forty minutes late, felt the US should "stay out of politics," but assist with the development of the local economy.

APRE APPLAUDS AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS

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¶20. (C) Seven local APRE directors met with Embassy officials. Luis Emilio Bustamente, departmental president of APRE, was the most vocal. All attending members were former PLC and expressed frustration with the election of Rizo as presidential candidate of the PLC, declaring "We split from the PLC because they are corrupt. Rizo was one of those that split from the PLC and then went back to them." They reiterated many times that Rizo is the wrong man to be the Liberal leader, and that APRE was born to fight the pact.

¶21. (SBU) All agreed that Herty Lewites has no significant following in Nueva Segovia. They expressed concern that the FSLN could win, based on the Sandinistas' performance in the mayoral elections of 2004 (the FSLN increased its control from fifty municipalities to over eighty municipalities). The APRE officials view the pacto as strong, stating that it plays to the FSLN's political advantage, while the Sandinista control of over 80 municipal budgets accords it an economic edge.

¶22. (SBU) Regarding the USG, APRE representatives commented "Trivelli is extraordinary," and "the Embassy hasn't done enough, the Embassy can do more" to have an impact against the PLC. They loved Ambassador's remarks about Ortega, noting the reference to Ortega as a tiger who hadn't changed his stripes: "the campesinos really responded to the colloquial expression." Bustamente wanted the Embassy to do more against the PLC and all present agreed, saying "the US should revoke more visas." APRE noted that the PLC has not won an election on its own, but only through alliances. They felt that Alvarado, who hasn't visited the region since October, would be better than Jose Rizo.

NUEVA SEGOVIA: DEMOGRAPHICS AND VOTING PROFILE

123. (U) Total Population (2005 est.): 211,233
Total Urban Population: 95,041
Total Rural Population: 116,219

Votes Received by Party, 2004 Municipal Elections

PLC:	33,975
FSLN:	35,845
APRE:	1,602
PRN:	6,668
AC:	113
Others:	1,064

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